



STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305 • (415) 321-1200

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Genetics

8177 ↓

[Handwritten signature]
en-14

9-29-69

Mr. Michael Davy
Observer

22 Tudor Street
London, E.C. 4, England

Dear Mr. Davy-- (privately)

Your piece of the 21st, on the Nobel-14 symposium, was right on the mark. I won't even quarrel with your characterization of my philosophical outlook, or lack thereof; though I may have some further comment on it, in a spirit of friendly discussion.

I was surprised to be reminded of Bofors, having forgotten if I ever knew it that this was Nobel's commercial successor. In fact, there was a certain amount of by-play about the arms trade, but it was no sense of delicacy that kept it from being a more prominent topic of discussion; rather that this, and a thousand other evils were inevitable side-effects of the world conflict. I would be interested to know whether the Nobel Foundation has any "interest" in Bofors; in any case, I think you did introduce it in a way that might confuse some readers about the possibility that this meeting, too, was another effusion of the military-industrial complex! The atmosphere among students in the U.S. is such that what you wrote would set them off just that way contrary, I am sure, to any intention on your part besides some subtle irony.

The Pearson report, as reflected in Guth's paper, surely will have some strong criticism of military assistance as a substitute for economic development!

About my non-ideology, I simply have to reflect that it is probably easier to make an effective argument that a course of action is foolish than immoral (e.g. BW). If I expressed a personal moral conviction, what particular right would I have to urge ~~it~~ it on anyone else. And on eschatological matters, particularly, I have to join myself with the species in insisting on our fallibility. I have found this kind of positive agnosticism to be of some help in formulating moral policies (possibly in the same sense that Heisenberg-unknowability of position and momentum, when consistently applied, leads to very strong conclusions in physics.) I believe that moral issues, which tend to divide people, should be translated as far as possible into technical ones, for which explicit and convergent solutions can be sought. (In my talk, I pointed out that ideological wars had wrought far more misery than private immoralities of any kind.) Ultimate moral questions do have to be faced, but always with the certainty of our own limitations in dealing with them -- we should therefore do the utmost to keep options open for future reversal.

Perhaps this anti-ideology is itself ideological. Or at least I should pretend so; feeble passions do not move mountains.

"Ring the bell on a glue company" does seem a mole hill.

Appreciatively,

[Handwritten signature]

MICHAEL DAVY